Lesson 1 - What is a wiki?

	Objectives
In this lesson we will:	

- provide an overview of what wikis are,
- and show some examples of their different uses.
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using wikis to develop content
- describe the main features of WikiEducator

A wiki is a web site that is generally editable by anyone with a computer, a web browser, and an internet connection. Wikis use a quick and easy syntax to allow users to apply formatting to text and create links between pages. This simple formating syntax means that authors no longer need to learn the complexities of HTML to create content on the web.

The main strength of a wiki is the ability to work collaboratively on the same document with a Internet browser being the only software requirement on the users machine. Consequently wikis are used for a variety of purposes. If you make a mistake, its easy to revert back to an earlier version of the document.

The name "Wiki" was chosen by Ward Cunningham -- the creator of the first Wiki. It is a shortened form of "wiki-wiki", the Hawaiian word for quick.

Examples of Wikis

The largest and most talked about Wiki on the Internet is Wikipedia.

Wikipedia is, for the most part, editable by anyone in the world with a computer and an internet connection and, at time of this writing, contained over 1,500,000 pages. One and a half million pages in English! There are also more than 250,000 articles in German, French, Polish, and Japanese; and more than 100,000 articles in Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Portugese, Russian, Swedish, and Chinese. That's nearing 2 million articles or pages!

While Wikipedia's mission is to create an encyclopedic resource of knowledge wikis can be used for a variety of purposes and are quickly becoming the defacto technology for collaborative group work online. They can be great social tools for classrooms, teams, community groups, or can even be configured to provide easily updatable web sites for organizations.

The following wikis display a range of different applications of wiki technology:

- Wikitravel - a project to create a free, complete, up-to-date, and reliable world-wide travel guide.
- WikiWikiWeb - the first ever wiki, it has been around since 1995.
- eXe Project - an example of how a wiki can be used to run a web site.

- Auckland.Wiki - a city wiki for the people of Auckland, New Zealand.

There are literally thousands of wikis around the web on a diverse range of subjects and supporting many communities.

	Activity

The purpose of this activity is to introduce you to a few examples of wiki projects. In this activity you are encouraged to visit at least three of Wikipedia's sister projects listed below.

For each of the Wikimedia project sites, you should:

1. Identify the main purpose of the site and how this differs from Wikipedia
2. Skim through at least three representative articles on the site to get a feel for contributions from the community
3. Determine which content license is used for the site.

Choose three sites from the list of Wikimedia projects below:

- Wikinews
- Wikimedia Commons
- Wikiversity
- Wikiquote
- Wiktionary

- Wikibooks

Many of Wikipedia's sister projects were initiated because the encyclopedia was being cluttered by entries that were not appropriate for an encyclopedia.

Interesting uses of Wiki technology

- British Council Case Study on using a wiki technology to promote collaboration at the office.
- Conference planning, see for example Wikimania 2006
- Wiki as an online presentation tool demonstrated by Meredith Gorran Farkas, a distance education librarian.
- Open Streetmap is a wiki project to provide free geographic data such as street maps to anyone who wants them.
- The Wealth of Networks WikiNotes - This Wiki is an invitation to collaborate on building a learning and research environment based on Yochai Benkler's book, The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom, available under a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike license.

- Other uses include:
- Meetings (Posting of agendas, prior meeting discussions, minutes)
- Documentation for collaborative projects
- Web space for personal note taking
- If you find a really interesting use of a wiki - please feel free to add this to the list above.

Advantages and disadvantages

In the old days you had to edit quite complex HTML syntax to create web pages.

```html
<td class="MainPageBG" style="width:45%;
<table width="100%" cellpadding="2"
<tr>
<th> <a name="The_purpose_of_WikiEducator">
</th></tr>
<tr>
<td style="color:#000">The WikiEducator is
<ul><li><b>planning</b> of education projec
</li><li><b>development</b> of free content
</li><li> work on building <b>open educatio
</li><li> networking on <b><a href="/Metawi
</li></ul>
</td></tr>
<tr>
<th>
<a name="Our_community_values..."></a><h2
</th></tr>
```

Advantages

- anyone can edit
- easy to use and learn
- Wikis are instantaneous so there is no need to wait for a publisher to create a new edition or update information
- people located in different parts of the world can work on the same document
- the wiki software keeps track of every edit made and it's a simple process to revert back to a previous version of an article
- widens access to the power of web publishing to non-technical users
- the wiki has no predetermined structure - consequently it is a flexible tool which can be used for a wide range of applications
- there are a wide range of open source software wiki's to choose from so licensing costs should be a barrier to installing an institutional wiki

Disadvantages

Advantages in one context may be a disadvantage in another.

- Anyone can edit and may be too open for some applications, for example confidential documentation. However it is possible to regulate user access.

- Open to SPAM and Vandalism if not managed properly. There are easy ways to restore a page however, and on WikiEducator you must be logged in to edit pages so this reduces vandalism by automated spam bots.
- Requires Internet connectivity to collaborate, but technologies to produce print versions of articles are improving
- The flexibility of a wiki's structure can mean that information becomes disorganized. As a wiki grows, the community plans and administers the structure collaboratively.

What about quality?

Before proceeding with the discussion activity for this tutorial, you should read the following short article.

	Reading

There is divided opinion and a healthy debate among educators concerning the quality of content developed in a wiki environment. In your opinion, do you expect to find significant differences in the quality of content when comparing open and closed authoring approaches? Given the recentness of the wiki phenomenon, research on this question is limited. Can both open and closed authoring models produce high quality material? To find out more, consider:

- The special report on Nature Magazine's article, Internet encyclopaedias go head to head

- The Wall Street Journal Online has an interesting debate between Jimbo Wales of Wikipedia and Dale Hoiberg, editor in chief of Encyclopedia Britannica, and you may find this to be an interesting read as well.

When comparing closed versus open authoring approaches, it is worth looking at the history of Wikipedia, which has succeeded in creating the largest encyclopedia in history. Wikipedia was preceded by the Nupedia project, which also aimed to build a free content encyclopedia. Nupedia was not an open wiki like Wikipedia and adopted an extensive process of peer review before final publication of an article. After 3.5 years, Nupedia had only completed 24 Articles, with 74 more articles as work in progress. Clearly this authoring model was not scalable, and was a strong motivation for Jimmy Wales, the founder of Nupedia to open up the authoring model by starting the Wikipedia project.

	Discussion

This activity is designed for participants using these lessons in a face-to-face workshop, or alternatively in an eLearning format with a group of learners. Consider the following questions, which can be discussed in small groups or using an online discussion forum:

- Do you have any concerns about the quality of educational resources developed using an open authoring approach? If so, what are your concerns? If not, how does an open authoring approach contribute to high quality learning materials?

- In your opinion, should course development for education use closed or open authoring approaches? Give reasons for your view?

- What mechanisms can be adopted to assure quality of educational content developed in Wiki environments?

Note: In a face-to-face class, you will discuss this in plenary or small groups. When taking the course in eLearning format, you are required to post your thoughts in the online discussion forum set up for this purpose (Not the discussion tab of this wiki page above).

	Reflection

I'm still concerned about the openness of wiki editing?

- What is to prevent such a website from anarchy?

- How does a wiki protect my authorship?

- What if someone deletes my work?

Matt Barton, provides a candid yet light hearted response to your concerns in a posting on a list, which is repeated here for convenience of access. Matt says:

"They [wikis] will not help a writer develop a personal voice. They will, however, enable collaboration and teach us all something very important about what a true democracy is all about.

So, if wikis elide all claims to authorship, offer no protection of material, and allow any 5-year old child or racist bigot to edit a page, what good are they? Well, let us explore why so many wikis are able to flourish in the well-fertilized fields in which they are sown.

For one thing, wikis are not really as vulnerable as you may think. They are at least as well-protected as your home. Now, I beg you to consider: Is your home really invulnerable? Couldn't a small group of hoodlums take it into their minds to vandalize your home? How is that you are able to drive a car at all, since anyone with a fifty-cent pocketknife could slash your tires wherever you park it?

You may say that the police are there to prevent such things. However, I'm looking out my apartment window now at my tiny little Mazda Miata. There are no uniformed people about. However, there are some neighbors. Hopefully they would notice if someone was deflating one of my tires and do something about it.

Wikis work under the same model. In wikipedia, authors can choose to "subscribe" to a wiki page, which means they are notified via email when anyone tries to change a page. They are free, of course, to re-visit the page and investigate. If someone has written something disagreeable, it's a small effort to change it back. You see, wikis do not only

Thus, while wikis by default display the top layer of each page, one can easily dig down into the underlying layers and examine the sediment there. What one finds is that highly controversial topics (like abortion) are often loaded with hundreds of layers, whereas boring topics like "comma usage" are typically left alone after three or four changes.

In short, wikis are protected not by code, or by law, but rather by the participation of an active wiki community. If you are proud of your entry, you will feel compelled to see what's up if you receive a notification that the entry has been changed, and "roll it back" if it's obvious the page was vandalized or rendered less intelligent."